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ABSTRACT

This paper provides information on testing programs for elementary and secondary school students that are administered or coordinated by the Office of Educational Accountability within the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction. The first section provides background and definitions of assessment alternatives, including various types of performance based assessments. The second section describes past assessment programs, and following sections outline current assessment programs in Wisconsin, previous and current assessment initiatives and federal requirements. The final section discusses funding for assessment initiatives. (Contains three tables.) (SLD)

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Pupil Assessment

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Pupil Assessment

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Pupil Assessment

This paper provides information on testing programs for elementary and secondary school pupils that are administered or coordinated by the Office of Educational Accountability within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The first section of this paper provides background and definitions on assessment alternatives; the second section describes past assessment programs; the following sections outline current assessment programs, previous and current assessment initiatives and federal requirements; and the final section discusses funding for assessment initiatives.

Background

In recent years, pupil assessment has become the focus of broader educational reforms in response to national reports that the academic performance of U.S. pupils has fallen behind that of other countries, particularly in areas requiring more complex thinking skills. There is evidence that gaps in performance between whites and minorities, economically advantaged and disadvantaged pupils, and males and females have also widened. As a result, greater emphasis has been placed on the purposes and content of pupil assessments and the consequences of test results for teachers, pupils, schools and school districts.

There are three primary purposes of pupil assessment: (1) to evaluate the quality and level of pupil achievement and indicate what pupils, teachers, schools, districts and states can do to improve their performance; (2) to provide accountability information (the relationship between public investment in education and pupil achievement); and (3) to provide information which can be used by teachers and pupils in decisions relating to remediation, program placement, career paths and ranking. Different types of assessments are administered depending on the kind of information sought. Below is a description, based on information provided from the DPI, on the most-widely used types of assessment instruments.

Standardized tests. Narrowly defined, standardized tests are tests given to a large number of pupils with identical directions, time limits and questions. Most standardized tests are purchased from commercial publishers. In the past, multiple-choice and true/false questions have been associated with standardized testing. However, recent developments in the field of educational testing have allowed test vendors to include short answer and essay questions in the standardized test as well. Standardized tests are used to measure knowledge of a particular subject or basic aptitude and may or may not be associated with the curriculum.

While standardized tests are available in a variety of skill levels and formats, two types of decisions are commonly made with their result: normative decisions and criterion-based decisions. Normative decisions measure a pupil's performance in relation to a norm group. Tests used to make normative decisions or norm-referenced tests (NRTs) compare the rankings of all pupils taking the test. Results from this type of exam are used to determine where pupils score in comparison to all other pupils. Test statistics such as percentiles, norm-equivalent scores and standardized scores are used to make normative decisions.

The second type of decisions made with standardized tests is criterion-based decisions. Test used to make criterion-based decisions or criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) measure how well pupils have learned specific curricular material.

Unlike NRTs, a pupil's score is not compared to that other pupils, but to a minimum standard or criterion. Statistics commonly used with CRTs are pass/fail rates and percent of mastery. Proficiency categories, like those used in Wisconsin, reflect criterion-based decisions. Scores are set for each category and pupils are placed into these categories based on their performance on the tests.

Standardized tests are widely used for accountability purposes because they allow comparisons among pupils, schools, school districts and states; are easy to administer and score; and are usually the most cost-effective type of test. However, they are frequently criticized as being culturally and/or economically biased and emphasizing less important factual knowledge and rote memorization skills rather than higher-order skills such as problem-solving, writing and critical thinking. Another criticism is that the pressure to raise standardized test scores encourages schools to adjust their curricula to focus on test material, or "teach to the test," which results in narrowing the curriculum and further encouragement of memorization skills over more complex thought. Norm-referenced tests in particular have been criticized as providing misleading information when the original norm group's scores are as much as a decade old. Critics of criterion-referenced tests dispute the use of standards, which they believe may be arbitrary, and the emphasis placed on passing the standard rather than performing as well as possible.

Performance Assessments: To address such criticisms of standardized tests and create assessments which are more authentic, representing situations that pupils may encounter in daily life, and valid, providing true and desired information about the abilities of pupils, many states and individual school districts have developed or are developing alternative assessments. These include various methods intended to measure not only knowledge of a particular subject, but also the use of complex reasoning and problem-solving skills. Also called performance-based or outcome-based assessments, performance assessments are designed to require pupils to demonstrate what they know and can do and to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge into the accomplishment of a task. Tasks are aligned with the curriculum and may include writing exercises, math problems, science experiments, open-ended multiple-choice questions or a combination of these. Unlike multiple-choice or true/false question, in which a pupil selects an answer, performance assessment require pupils to produce an answer. For example, such assessment could require pupils to write an essay or solve a mathematical problem showing the steps involved in reaching the solution. The U.S. Department of Education classifies performance assessments into three categories: open-ended tasks, extended tasks and portfolios.

Open-ended tasks are activities in which pupils respond immediately to a question. Short answer or essay questions are considered open-ended tasks. Extended tasks are activities that required long time periods to complete. For example, a science experiment, which requires several days to complete, would be an extended task. In this example, a pupil might be scored based upon the outcome of the experiment. A portfolio is a file or collection of student projects and/or tasks collected over an extended period of time. Portfolios may include both open-ended and extended tasks such as artistic projects, tasks completed in cooperation with other students, written assignments and items that the pupil feels represent his or her best effort.

Proponents of alternative assessments argue that because they are intended to be intrinsically valid and authentic, they will automatically improve instruction and emphasize and expedite the achievement of valuable educational goals. However, significant obstacles to the implementation of alternative assessments exist. Due to the complexity of the tasks involved, alternative assessments are more costly and less efficient to develop and score than traditional tests. Generally, these assessments must be manually scored by trained readers whose work is monitored for consistency. In some programs, each assessment is scored by

two or more readers and the results averaged. Because alternative assessments require substantial amounts of time to complete and score, the number of tasks must be limited which increases the possibility of bias as well as insufficient content coverage. Perhaps the most critical challenge for developers of alternative assessments is how to design and score them in order to provide accountability information such as comparative data for pupils, schools and school districts.

Nonetheless, DPI notes that performance assessments have many positive characteristics. They do tend to be designed more like the activities and tasks pupils experience in their classes. Because these assessments look similar to the types of activities experienced in the classroom, parents and students believe them to be valid. Teachers who are qualified as readers for performance assessment tend to be more aware of what is tested and thus better able to communicate curricula and standards to their students.

Both standardized tests and performance assessments provide useful assessment information. The Department indicates that many test vendors are creating tests that utilize both performance assessment and standardized tests through "multiple assessments." Vendors now can combine multiple-choice, true/false, short answer and essay questions into one test. These new "multiple-assessments" typically have a larger proportion of multiple-choice items. The combination of both types can provide more complete information on a pupil's education.

Previous Wisconsin Assessment Programs

1. Wisconsin Pupil Assessment Program 1975-1987. The Wisconsin Pupil Assessment Program was designed to measure pupil achievement in specific skill areas using both criterion- and norm-referenced examinations. The tests were administered to a randomly selected sample of pupils in a group of schools chosen according to their geographic location, district size and grade enrollment.

2. Competency-Based Testing Program (CBT) 1985-1992. The criterion-referenced, curriculum-based CBT exams were designed to test pupils at certain grade levels for minimum standards of proficiency in reading, language arts and mathematics. Participation by school districts was voluntary and the district could either develop its own exams, with DPI approval, or use test questions developed by DPI. Participating districts were required to test all pupils once in grades K to 5, once in grades 6 to 8, and once in grades 9 to 11 and were reimbursed by DPI for the costs of printing and scoring the exams.

Districts administering the CBT were required to release test results to pupils' parents or guardians and provide remediation services to any pupil whose test scores did not meet district minimum standards. District scores were reported to the school board with recommendations for curricular changes. Since the results were neither made public, nor provided to DPI, there was no method for comparing the performance of one district to another even if identical tests were used. Each district's scores were, however, included in its annual performance disclosure report required by state law.

3. Achievement Tests (Standard "s") 1988-1992. The achievement tests, or standard "s" tests, (named after s. 121.02 (1)(s) of the statutes), were similar to CBTs in that districts were required to test pupils in reading, language arts and mathematics using curriculum-based tests. Although the standard "s" tests differed from the CBT tests in the frequency of testing required, districts which participated fully in the CBT program automatically met this standard. The results were used to determine if program goals were being met and to monitor pupil achievement. No remediation or parental notification was required.

Current Wisconsin Assessment Programs

In 1991 Act 269, the CBT program and the standard "s" requirement were repealed. These programs were replaced by a requirement that school districts, beginning in 1993-94, administer "knowledge and concepts" examinations in the 8th and 10th grades and beginning in 1996-97 administer a 4th grade knowledge and concepts examination. The tests are designed to measure a pupil's knowledge in the subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, reading and language arts, including an assessment of a pupil's writing ability.

The following section describes the current Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS), which includes the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test at 3rd grade and the 4th, 8th and 10th grade knowledge and concepts exams.

Wisconsin's Reading Comprehension Test (WRCT). Current law requires all districts to annually administer a standardized reading test, developed by DPI, to 3rd grade pupils. Formerly the Third Grade Reading Test, the WRCT is a test given in the spring of each year, intended to: (a) identify marginal readers who may need remediation; (b) provide comparative performance data by school and school district; (c) allow school districts to evaluate their reading programs; and (d) provide data for meeting federal and state requirements regarding student assessment.

Remedial reading services for pupils in kindergarten through grade four are required if: (a) a pupil fails to meet the district's reading objectives; or (b) a pupil fails to meet the minimum performance standard on the WRCT and either the teacher and the pupil's parent or guardian agree that the test results accurately reflect the pupil's ability or the teacher determines that based upon other objective evidence of the pupil's reading comprehension, the test results reflect the pupil's reading ability. Only 3rd grade pupils identified as limited-English speaking (LES) or children with disabilities may be excluded from taking the WRCT.

The WRCT was first given in the 1988-89 school year to 56,533 third graders. In 1997-98, 57,811 pupils took the exam. The test is currently comprised of three reading passages, two narrative selections and one expository passage and three types of questions: (a) reading comprehension; (b) prior knowledge; and (c) reading strategies. The exam, which includes approximately 100 questions is taken over three testing sessions within three weeks. Through 1997, test scores for the reading comprehension questions were placed into three performance categories: above the performance standard, inconclusive and below the performance standard. DPI defined inconclusive as neither clearly above nor below the standard.

Beginning in 1998, test score reporting categories were redefined as four proficiency levels: (a) advanced, defined as distinguished in the content area; (b) proficient, meaning competent in the content area; (c) basic, defined as somewhat competent in the content area; and (d) minimal, meaning limited achievement in the content area. Students who score in the minimal proficiency level must be evaluated further to determine if they are in need of remedial reading or other services. The Department indicates that students who score above the minimal level are said to meet the minimum performance standard, while the proficient and advanced levels are the long-term educational goals for all students. These levels are based on what DPI, in conjunction with teachers across the state, determined a pupil should know in order to meet the state's recently issued academic standards.

For the 1997-98 test, the maximum score was 63 points with performance scores based on the following: (a) advanced – 60 to 63 points; (b) proficient – 50 to 59 points; (c) basic – 34 to 49 points; and (d) minimal – 33 or less points. Scores

for reading strategy and prior knowledge are not included in the performance scores, rather those scores are used to interpret results on the comprehension questions. The statewide average score for the reading comprehension question was 52.1 points out of 63 total points. Table 1 shows the statewide totals of pupil scores on the WRCT for 1997-98 according to each new proficiency level.

Table 1
1997-98 Statewide Reading Comprehension Test Results

Proficiency Level	Number Tested	% of Total
Advanced	11,880	18.6%
Proficient	29,431	46.2
Basic	13,260	20.8
Minimal	3,240	5.1
Subtotal	57,811	90.7%
Excluded	5,954	9.3
Total	63,765	100.0%

The 1997-98 WRCT exam questions were developed by Wisconsin teachers in conjunction with MetriTech, Inc. the contractor for WRCT development. A state advisory committee made up of educators reviews all test items and pilot questions. MetriTech, Inc. is also responsible for the production, distribution, scoring and reporting of the results of the WRCT under a separate contract.

Administrative rules provide that DPI will pay for printing, distribution, scoring and reporting the results of the WRCT. Under current law, school districts are allowed to provide the scoring of the exams and DPI is required to reimburse the districts for such costs, not to exceed the cost to DPI of scoring. The cost of printing, distribution, scoring and reporting the results of the WRCT was $231,300 in 1997-98. In addition, DPI incurred test development costs of $178,700 in 1997-98.

Knowledge and Concepts Examinations. In 1992-93, DPI was required to make available to districts, at no charge, examinations designed to evaluate the level of knowledge attained by pupils in the 8th and 10th grades. District participation was voluntary in 1992-93 and required beginning in the 1993-94 school year. A third exam, for pupils in fourth grade, was added under 1995 Act 27. School district participation for the 4th grade exam was voluntary in 1995-96 and required beginning in the 1996-97 school year.

Currently, the 4th, 8th and 10th grade knowledge and concepts examinations are designed to evaluate the level of knowledge attained by pupils in the areas of mathematics, science, social studies, reading and language arts/writing. In 1997-98, the 4th, 8th and 10th grade tests consisted of multiple choice and short-answer questions in language arts, reading, mathematics, science and social studies and a writing test related to an assigned reading passage. In addition, each 8th and 10th grade test contains an optional, non-academic section consisting of questions related to the pupil's career interests, intended to aid in pupil guidance counseling and course selection. To familiarize 4th grade pupils with test content and format, school districts are required to administer a practice activities test before the pupils take the 4th grade knowledge and concept examination.

School boards can decide to exclude from testing limited English-speaking (LES) pupils, may permit such pupils to be examined in his or her native language or can modify the format and administration of the tests for these pupils. Districts must include children with disabilities in the tests, with appropriate modifications where necessary or alternative assessments for those children who cannot participate in the assessment. If a district excludes certain children with disabilities from the assessment then a statement explaining why that assessment was not appropriate and how the pupil will be assessed through alternative means must be included in the pupil's individualized educational program. In

addition, a statement must be included in a pupil's program indicating any modifications that were made to the pupil's assessment. Any 4th, 8th or 10th grade pupil may be excused from taking the tests upon the request of the pupil's parent or guardian.

The full battery of tests, for each grade level, requires approximately six hours to complete and is usually administered over a three-day period. In 1993-94, the first year of required administration, 55,570 8th grade pupils, or 86% of the total 8th grade enrollment, completed all subject area tests. At the 10th grade level, 50,561 pupils, or 80% of the total 10th grade enrollment, completed all subject area tests. In 1997-98, approximately 58,759 4th grade pupils (93% of the total enrollment), 62,990 8th grade pupils (95%) and 63,391 10th grade pupils (91%) completed each subject area test. According to DPI, participation rates vary widely across schools. A three-week testing window is provided to allow local flexibility in scheduling for make-up testing. Despite this fact, many students who are required to be tested are not. The Department notes that economically disadvantage and minority students tend to have lower participation rates than other student groups.

Starting in 1997-98, results of the knowledge and concepts examinations are reported by proficiency categories. Separate results are reported for each test area: reading, mathematics, science, social studies and language arts/writing. Scores on the writing sample were combined with scores on the language arts test. These combined scores were called enhanced language scores. The Department indicates that these scores were difficult to explain and delayed reporting and as a result, scores for the writing sample and language arts tests will be reported separately in 1998-99. Writing scores are not be used for performance scoring purposes. The proficiency levels are categorized as minimal performance, basic, proficient and advanced and generally defined the same as the WRCT.

Proficiency summaries are reported for all students who have been enrolled in the school or district for a full academic year, regardless of disability or English-proficiency status. Previously, scores were reported only for students who took the test. Under the new proficiency levels reporting, those pupils not tested are listed under the not tested category and are not included in proficiency level scoring. For 1998-99, DPI will also report the percentage of students not excluded or excused from the test. As in the past, scores of students tested are also reported as percentile rankings that compare each pupil's performance to that of their peers statewide and nationwide in each subject area.

The 1997-98, Wisconsin's statewide test results according the proficiency level and the national percentile rank of the average score of students tested for each subject area of the 4th, 8th and 10th grade tests are provided in Table 2. The normative data is based on all students tested while the statewide proficiency scores are reported for all students enrolled. The table shows, for each grade level tested and by each test area, the percentage of students enrolled in the school or district for a full academic year that scored at each proficiency level and the percentage of students that were not tested. In addition, the Table 2 provides the national percentile rank for each test area according to grade level. The national percentile rank compares each pupil's performance with the performance of a national norm group of pupils. For example, the national percentile rank for the 4th grade reading test in 1997-98 was 66, which means that the average student in Wisconsin scored as well as or higher than approximately 66% of the students in the national norm group. The national percentile ranks range from 1 to 99 with the average rank in the national norm group of 50.

Federal law requires that the results must also be reported by gender, race/ethnicity, by English proficiency status, migrant status, by students with disabilities as compared to non-disabled students and by economically disadvantaged students as compared to students who are not economically disadvantaged. The results of the 4th, 8th and 10th grades 1997-98 exams for all pupils, by school dis-

trict, school, and by demographic group with the district or school are available on DPI's website. [www.dpi.state.wi.us/spr/kce98.html] The Department advises that school and district national percentile ranks based on students tested should be interpretated with caution when test participation rates are low, because student groups with the lowest achievement levels typically have the lowest test participation rates while school results based only on students tested would be higher for schools that do not test lower achieving students.

Schools are held accountable for achievement and progress in each subject area. Low achievement in reading, for example, is not offset by high achievement in math. Current law prohibits using the results of the knowledge and concepts tests to evaluate teacher performance, discipline teachers or as a reason for nonrenewal of their contracts. Further, a district's scores may not be used to determine its general or categorical school aids. The tests are also required, to the extent possible, to be free from bias.

The contract costs for printing, scoring and reporting the results of these assessments was $1,500,000 in 1997-98, and is budgeted to be $1,524,000 in 1998-99. DPI currently provides these examinations through a six-year contract with a testing vendor, CTB/McGraw Hill.

Under 1997 Act 237, starting in 1998-99 a school board operating elementary grades may develop or adopt its own examination designed to measure pupil attainment of knowledge and concepts in 4th and 8th grades. If a school board develops or adopts its own examination it is required to notify DPI. In addition, the board must provide the State

Table 2
1997-98 Statewide Knowledge and Concepts Exam Results (Percent of Pupils in each Proficiency Level)

	Reading	Enhanced Language*	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
4th Grade					
Not Tested	7%	7%	6%	6%	6%
Minimal	7%	10%	8%	8%	10%
Basic	16%	43%	34%	22%	21%
Proficient	57%	36%	37%	51%	49%
Advanced	12%	4%	15%	13%	13%
Nat'l Percentile Rank	66	63	64	61	59
8th Grade					
Not Tested	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
Minimal	17%	16%	24%	12%	8%
Basic	15%	61%	41%	27%	18%
Proficient	48%	17%	22%	40%	43%
Advanced	16%	1%	8%	16%	26%
Nat'l Percentile Rank	65	62	65	66	63
10th Grade					
Not Tested	8%	8%	8%	9%	9%
Minimal	9%	15%	30%	18%	10%
Basic	20%	45%	26%	30%	15%
Proficient	38%	26%	27%	34%	38%
Advanced	25%	6%	8%	9%	27%
Nat'l Percentile Rank	71	68	75	66	68

* Includes writing scores.

Superintendent with statistical correlations of those examinations with the 4th and 8th grade knowledge and concepts examinations adopted or approved by the State Superintendent and the federal Department of Education must approve the examination. Districts adopting their own assessments that also receive federal funding under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 or Goals 2000 are required to meet certain federal requirements, which are described in a following section.

Previous State Assessment Initiatives

The Educational Goals Committee. This committee, which consisted of 12 members including the Governor, State Superintendent, President of the UW System, Director of the Wisconsin Technical College System and members appointed jointly by the Governor and State Superintendent was required to hold 12 regional conferences and one statewide conference to allow school boards and the public to submit their recommendations. A final list of 28 goals, was submitted to the Legislature in September, 1993. The goals were placed in three categories: (a) learner goals which indicate expectations of students; (b) institutional goals which refer to school staff and environment; and (c) societal goals which focus on conditions outside of the educational community. Although the new goals were intended to replace those currently provided in the statutes, no statutory changes which would accomplish this were made.

The State Superintendent Assessment Advisory Committee (SSAAC). Comprised of teachers, parents and other interested persons appointed by the State Superintendent, SSAAC was charged with advising the State Superintendent on utilizing the new educational goals in the development of a new pupil assessment program. The State Superintendent was required to submit a report to the Legislature by January 1, 1994, on plans for implementing such an assessment program in the 1996-97 school year. The report recommended a program consisting of three types of assessments to be based on the first three of the proposed new learner goals which state that a pupil: (a) build a substantial knowledge base; (b) develop thinking and communication processes; and (c) apply knowledge and processes.

While the assessment program would have been based on the first three learner goals, the advisory committee recommended that more detailed "learner outcomes" be used to guide the development of the assessment items. The 17 learner outcomes, which were developed by DPI with input from Wisconsin educators at several meetings in 1992 and 1993, stated more precisely what students should be able to do, for example, develop and test a hypothesis.

The Department began developing WSAS following the recommendations of the SSAAC, and requested that funding be included in the 1995-97 biennial budget. The proposed assessment program included limited response tests, performance assessments, portfolios and gateway assessments at the 10th grade level. Funding for these changes in the assessment program was not authorized by the Legislature; however, the Legislature did require DPI to study the utility of administering technology-based performance assessments.

Governor's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning. In January, 1996, the Governor created the Governor's Advisory Taskforce on Education and Learning by executive order to address policies surrounding educational standards, assessment and accountability. Specifically, the Taskforce was directed to: (a) identify which educational functions should be performed by the state and which should be performed at the local level through school districts or CESAs; (b) evaluate the current use of state resources to determine the best method to assist school districts in providing quality educational opportunities; and (c) identify the tools which need to be strengthened or utilized to

achieve the goal of greater student learning.

Appointed by the Governor and composed of the Secretaries of the Departments of Administration and Revenue (DOR) and members of the state's business community, education professions and general public, the Taskforce created several subcommittees, including a Subcommittee on Standards and Assessment. This subcommittee, which included the State Superintendent, the Secretary of DOR, the Lieutenant Governor and parents, teachers and school administrators studied topics such as a high school graduation test, detailed statewide standards and various testing options. The Taskforce released its final report in March, 1996.

Recent State Assessment Initiatives

Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards. By executive order in January, 1997, the Governor created the Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards. The Council consisted of the Lieutenant Governor who served as chair, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the chairs and ranking minority members of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees and one public member appointed by the Governor. The Council was responsible for working on the development of academic standards for all pupils in English language, arts, mathematics, science and social studies at grades 4, 8 and 12.

As part of the 1997-99 biennial budget bill, 1997 Act 27, a Standards Development Council, under the Office of the Governor, was statutorily created that was nearly identical to the Governor's Council. Statutorily, the Council was required review to the Governor's proposed pupil academic standards in mathematics, science, reading and writing, geography and history. Through 1997, the Council held various public meetings on the proposed standards. The Council's final recommendations on the standards were provided to the Governor in December of 1997. The Governor then had 30 days to approve or disapprove of the Council's recommendations. In January, 1998, the Governor approved the recommended standards and issued the standards as an executive order. By August 1, 1998, each school board had to either adopt these statewide academic standards or develop their own. The Council is required to review the issued pupil academic standards periodically. If the Governor approves any subsequent modifications to the standards recommended by the Council, the changes can be issued as an executive order.

High School Examinations. Under 1997 Act 27, each school district that operates a high school is required to administer the high school graduation test adopted by the board at least twice each school year beginning in 2000-01. The school board is required to determine in which high school grades the exam would be administered each year. In addition, a board must excuse a pupil from the high school graduation exam upon the request of a parent or guardian.

A school board must adopt a high school graduation exam that measures whether pupils meet pupil academic standards adopted by the school board. If the board adopts the statewide standards issued by executive order, the board could adopt the high school graduation exam developed by DPI. If a school board develops and adopts its own high school graduation examination, it is required to notify DPI. The current 10th grade examination will sunset on June 30, 2001.

In the 1997-99 biennium, $1,350,000 GPR ($500,000 in 1997-98 and $850,000 in 1998-99) is budgeted for DPI's development of the high school graduation test.

Beginning on September 1, 2002, a school board can not grant a high school diploma to any pupil unless the pupil has passed the high school graduation exam. School boards are required to provide pupils with at least four opportunities in

the high school grades to take the exam. A pupil may be excused from the high school graduation exam upon the request of a parent or guardian. School boards are required to establish alternative criteria upon which to determine qualification for high school graduation if a pupil has been excused from the high school graduation exam. In order to graduate from high school, a pupil who was excused from the examination must satisfy the alternative criteria.

The Department has requested, as part of its 1999-01 biennial budget request, $3,683,800 GPR in 1999-00 and $6,703,900 GPR in 2000-01 and the creation of 7.0 FTE positions for the continued development and administration of the "high stakes" high school graduation test.

4th and 8th Grade Retention Examinations. Under 1997 Act 237, beginning with the 2002-03 school year, if a school board administers the state's 4th or 8th grade examination, it may not promote a pupil to 5th or 9th grade if he or she does not score at the basic level or above in each subject area on the 4th and 8th grade knowledge and concepts examination. If a school board administers its own 4th or 8th grade examination, it may not promote a pupil to 5th and 9th grade unless the pupil achieves a passing score, as determined by the school board, on the examinations. School boards are required to provide a pupil with at least two opportunities to achieve a score sufficient for promotion on the 4th or 8th grade examination.

A school board may determine not to administer an examination to a pupil enrolled in a special education program or a limited-English speaking pupil, and a school board may modify the format and administration of an examination for these pupils or permit a pupil to be examined in his or her native language. Additionally, school boards are required to excuse a pupil from taking the 4th or 8th grade examination upon the request of the pupil's parent or guardian. Each board is required to develop alternative criteria for evaluating a pupil who did not take the 4th or 8th grade examination that was required for promotion to 5th or 9th grade. A pupil who did not take the examination but satisfies the alternative criteria may be promoted to the next grade.

As part of its 1999-01 biennial budget request DPI requested $2,240,000 GPR in 1999-00 and $3,280,000 GPR in 2000-01 for the development of the 4th and 8th grade exams that will be used to determine grade promotion.

Federal Assessment Programs and Requirements

This section provides a discussion of a national assessment program in which Wisconsin voluntarily participates and recent changes to federal law that directly effect pupil assessment in Wisconsin.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP, commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, is intended to provide a continuous national survey of educational achievement and trends. The program is administered by the Commissioner of Educational Statistics, who heads the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education. The independent National Assessment Governing Board, appointed by the Secretary of Education governs the program and is responsible for selection of subject area to be assessed, development of assessment methodology, standards, testing procedures and reporting. Under NAEP, objective-referenced tests are administered periodically to a representative, randomly selected national and state samples of approximately 533,000 4th-, 8th- and 12th-grade pupils. Although the majority of items included in the NAEP are fixed-response, machine-scorable, multiple-choice questions, NAEP began incorporating open-ended questions in 1990.

Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, writing, science, history/geography or other areas including music, art, computer competence and civics. The NAEP has used the results to track changes in national student achievement levels over time and collect information on pupil performance by gender, race/ethnicity and other variables intended to indicate the pupils' instructional experiences. In 1990, NAEP began administering trial state-level assessments with an 8th-grade mathematics assessment, which represented the first national program designed to provide state-by-state comparisons of pupil achievement. Previously, NAEP was specifically prohibited from reporting results at the state level.

In 1992, 42 states (including Washington, DC) participated in the Trial State Assessment. Wisconsin's average proficiency scores on all of the three individual assessments were above the national and regional averages. Although NAEP did not rank state scores, no state had an average proficiency score which was statistically significantly higher than Wisconsin's on any of the assessments. In 1994, Wisconsin ranked third, behind Maine and North Dakota, out of the 41 states and the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Overseas Schools and Guam that participated in the 4th grade reading proficiency examinations. Overall, 71 percent of Wisconsin pupils who participated, scored at or above the basic reading level, compared to 65 percent for states that participated in the central region (Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wisconsin) and 59 percent nationally.

In 1996, Wisconsin took part in the 8th grade state-level science and the 4th and 8th grade state-level mathematics examinations. Forty-four states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the Department of Defense participated in the 1996 state-level assessment program. For Wisconsin public school 8th grade students the average science score was 160 compared to 155 for states that participated in the central region and 148 nationally, out of a possible 300 points. In 1996, Wisconsin 4th grade students' average score on the mathematics examination was 231, out of a possible 500. Nationally the average was 222 and 230 in the central region. Overall, 27 percent of Wisconsin pupils, who participated, scored at or above the proficient level compared to 20 percent nationally. Eighth grade students' average math score was 283, compared to the national average of 271 and central region average of 276. Thirty-two percent of the Wisconsin students that participated performed at or above the proficient level compared to 23 percent nationwide.

The 1997-98 national assessment consisted of civics, reading and writing examinations at 4th, 8th and 12th grades. The state assessment, no longer considered a trial assessment, included a reading examination for 4th and 8th grades and a writing test for 8th grade pupils. In 1997-98, NAEP randomly selected 138 Wisconsin school districts to participate in at least one portion of the national assessment program including, 108 schools from 80 districts for the 4th grade reading test; and 113 schools from 89 districts for the 8th grade reading and writing exam. Approximately 2,500 students in each grade and subject in Wisconsin participated in the 1997-98 assessment. Test scores for the NAEP exams administered in 1998 had not been released as of January 1, 1999.

In order to administer the exams consistently nationwide, NAEP trains state and local staff in the procedures involved with administering the examinations. The assessments are conducted during February by state and local staff, with a subsample of exam sessions observed by federal-level NAEP officials. During testing years, DPI dedicates approximately a 0.5 FTE position to administering NAEP at the state level.

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 and Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994. Several federal laws have impacted the programs of the DPI Office of Educational Accountability, including the WSAS and state standards for

student performance. In 1994, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, renaming it the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), and passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. In 1999, the IASA is up for congressional reauthorization. The IASA provides funding to states that complete statewide educational plans approved by the U.S. Department of Education in areas including academic standards, pupil assessment and educational accountability. Additionally, IASA requires states to adopt challenging content and pupil performance standards in at least mathematics and reading or language arts, as well as administer yearly pupil assessments that determine whether pupils are meeting the state's performance standards. Title I of IASA also sets forth requirements for assisting disadvantaged pupils meet state academic standards.

State Standards for Content and Performance. The IASA state plans, which must be coordinated with efforts made under Goals 2000, include requirements for standards that must be adopted in order to qualify for federal funding. Content standards must: (a) specify what pupils are expected to know and be able to do; (b) contain coherent and rigorous content; and (c) encourage the teaching of advanced skills. Performance standards must: (a) be aligned with the content standards; (b) describe two levels of high performance, proficient and advanced, that determine how well children are mastering the material in the content standards; and (c) describe a third level of performance, partially proficient, to provide complete information about the progress of lower performing pupils toward achieving the high levels of performance. Additionally, states must ensure that children with disabilities and LES pupils are taught the same knowledge and skills, and held to the same high standards, to the maximum extent appropriate, as other pupils. Local school districts must develop the instructional methods and strategies to ensure the achievement of these standards.

The Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards along with DPI have developed state academic standards in the core subjects of English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, that will comply with the federal regulations under IASA. The Department conducted a series of focus groups and forums with members of the public, teachers and other educators to generate drafts of these standards. Revisions to the standards have been made based on public comment and pilot projects which assess pupil performance in individual classrooms. Local school districts are required to use the statewide standards as models for equivalent, or more stringent, standards in order to qualify for federal funds. If local standards are used for ISAS compliance purposes then these local standards must be aligned with the state standards.

State Pupil Assessment Programs. Under IASA state assessment programs must: (a) use the same assessments to measure the performance of all children; (b) be aligned with the state's standards and provide information about the attainment of the standards; (c) be consistent with relevant, nationally recognized professional and technical standards; (d) measure the proficiency of pupils in the core subject areas for which the state has adopted standards; (e) be administered some time during elementary, middle and high school; (f) involve multiple up-to-date measures of pupil performance, including higher order thinking skills; (g) include participation of all pupils, reasonable accommodations or alternative assessments for pupils with disabilities as necessary and the inclusion of LES pupils assessed in their native language to the extent practicable; (h) include pupils who have attended one or more schools in the district for a full academic year; (i) provide individual pupil interpretive and descriptive reports; and (j) provide data based on several demographic categories, including information on children with disabilities participating in regular assessments and alternative assessments. If local assessments are used for IASA compliance purposes these assessments must also: (a) be aligned with Wisconsin

state standards and assessments; (b) given at the same grade spans as the state's assessments; and (c) meet Wisconsin's requirements for statistical correlation of the local exam with the state exam, quality and accountability.

Additionally, IASA requires the state to annually review the performance of districts and schools based primarily on statewide assessments. Although all pupils, even those new to a district, must be tested, only the performance of pupils enrolled in a district for a year or more would be considered in the review.

The WSAS already meets many of these requirements, such as knowledge and concepts assessments at 4th, 8th and 10th grades. However, according to DPI, the state, school districts and schools must make progress in areas such as including LES pupils and children with disabilities in assessments and providing assessments which cover a wider range of the newly-created academic standards. The Department indicates that current examinations were reviewed by groups of Wisconsin educators to determine whether individual test questions assessed the model academic performance standards and the extent to which the model academic standards are assessed by the current examinations. The Department indicates that the results of this study indicated that 97% (grade 4) to 99% (grade 8) of the exam questions assessed the standards and that 54% (grade 8) to 67% (grade 4) of the standards were tested in the exam.

In 1998-99, IASA funds are budgeted to support 2.4 positions related to assessment within DPI's Office of Educational Accountability. In total, Wisconsin received approximately $125 million under IASA and approximately $7.9 million under Goals 2000 in 1997-98, of which approximately $130 million was provided as local assistance to school districts to be used in areas such as assisting economically disadvantaged pupils, staff development, safe and drug free schools, educational technology, innovation educational programs, assessments and standards and various other educational programs.

Funding for Pupil Assessment

Table 3 provides a breakdown of total funding provided to DPI for pupil assessment programs from 1995-96 to 1998-99. The table identifies costs in three areas:

1. Printing, scoring and reporting costs. Since 1995-96, DPI has been required to pay for the administration of the knowledge and concepts exams through an annual state operations appropriation, rather than through a local assistance appropriation that reimbursed school districts for the costs districts incurred. In 1998-99, this includes the cost of the contracts with CTB/McGraw Hill for the knowledge and concepts exams and with MetriTech, Inc. for the WRCT.

2. Contract costs for the development of performance-based assessments and portfolios and for updates to the Wisconsin reading comprehension test. Since 1996-97, no funding was provided for performance assessments or portfolio development.

3. Program operations costs. In 1998-99, the Office of Educational Accountability within DPI consists of 12.0 authorized positions which are directly responsible for assessment-related activities. Federal funds support 2.4 of these positions. In 1997-98, expenditures for salaries and fringe benefits was lower than normal due to a vacancy, which was filled with a limited term employee. The supplies and services budget includes items such as data processing, printing, travel, space rental, postage, conferences and consultant expenses.

All items included in Table 3 are funded with state general purpose revenue (GPR) except where noted as federal funding.

Table 3

Funding for DPI Pupil Assessment Programs

	1995-96 Actual	1996-1997 Actual	1997-98 Actual	1998-99 Budgeted
Printing, Scoring and Reporting				
Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test	$175,800	$250,000	$231,250	$313,000
Knowledge and Concepts Exams	948,000	1,425,000	1,500,000	1,524,000
	295,000 FED			
Development				
Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test	195,300	174,000	178,700	188,000
Performance Assessment	7,500	0	0	0
Portfolio	45,000	0	0	0
High School Graduation Test	0	0	493,000	856,400
4th and 8th Grade Promotion Test	NA	NA	0	0
Program Operations				
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	675,100	683,000	597,200	684,000
	17,000 FED	95,000 FED	98,000 FED	169,000 FED
Supplies and Services	260,400	289,000	189,300	267,800
	700 FED	29,000 FED	0 FED	0 FED
Permanent Property	0	0	7,000	3,600
TOTAL	$2,619,800	$2,945,000	$3,294,500	$4,005,800
Permanent Positions (FTE)	10.6	9.6	9.6	9.6
	0.4 FED	2.4 FED	2.4 FED	2.4 FED
TOTAL	11.0	12.0	12.0	12.0